

Random Encounters

Nasty Surprises

By Jeff Quick



The Unexpectedly Powerful Monster

A continually unsettling moment for players is when a combat they thought would be relatively easy turns out to be hard. It turns player expectation on its ear when something they thought they knew suddenly becomes unknown. Prime examples of this sort of situation can include orcs with barbarian or sorcerer levels or monsters with unexpected templates. For experienced players, choose iconic monsters such as beholders or roppers, where the players know just enough to think they know what's coming.

In the first round of combat, have the monster lead with its most devastating attack in an attempt to deal maximum damage on its first blow. Everyone at the table may get a jolt when the clerical umber hulk drops a maximized *flame strike* on the front ranks.

When you do this, try to spend it on the PCs with the most hit points. Physically overpowering the party wizard isn't really all that awe-inspiring, but knocking out half the barbarian's hit points in one attack could have everyone wondering what else their latest opponent can dish out. Below are a couple of ready-made monsters you can drop on characters.



Furthsthfa Viciousmien

Furthsthfa came across a wisdom-boosting magic stole when he destroyed a group of pious adventurers who entered his lair. After paying to have it identified, he put it on. The sudden burst of insight compelled him to further his power by worshipping evil gods of the underground. The umber hulk doesn't seem too fixated on one god; Maglubiyet, Erythnul, Lolth, and a few obscure underground monster deities all seem part of Furthsthfa's ecumenical hate. Now, he travels on an unholy mission to punish further surface intrusion into the evil dark below. Unnecessary digging and loud noises seem to be among his most punishable activities.

Furthsthfa: Male umber hulk cleric 7; CR 14; Large aberration; HD 8d8+35 plus 7d8+28; hp 130; Init +1; Spd 20 ft., burrow 20 ft.; AC 20, touch 12, flat-footed 19; Base Atk +11; Grp +21; Atk +16 melee (2d6+6, 2 claws); Full Atk +16 melee (2d6+6, 2 claws) and +14 melee (2d8+3, bite); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA confusing gaze, rebuke undead 4/day; SQ darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.; AL CE; SV Fort +13, Ref +5, Will +15; Str 23, Dex 13, Con 19, Int 11, Wis 18, Cha 13.

Skills and Feats: Climb +12, Concentration +9, Hide -3, Jump +9, Knowledge (religion) +5, Listen +13; Craft Wand, Empower Spell, Great Fortitude, Improved Natural Attack (claw), Multiattack, Toughness.

Confusing Gaze (Su): Any creature within 30 feet that meets Furthsthfa's gaze is affected as if by confusion (caster level 8th; Will DC 15 negates).

Tremorsense (Ex): Furthsthfa can detect the location of any creature within 60 feet that is in contact with the ground.

Cleric Spells Prepared (6/6/5/4/3; save DC 14 + spell level): 0 -- *create water*, *detect magic* (2), *inflict minor wounds* (2), *read magic*; 1st -- *cause fear*, *comprehend languages*, *endure elements*, *entropic shield*, *protection from good**, *sanctuary*; 2nd -- *bear's endurance*, *darkness*, *death knell*, *desecrate**, *silence*; 3rd -- *animate dead*, *contagion**, *dispel magic*, *protection from energy*; 4th -- *dismissal*, *lesser planar ally*, *unholy blight**.

*Domain spell. Deity: None. Domains: Destruction (smite 1/day), Evil (cast evil spells at +1 caster level).

Possessions: *Stole of Wisdom* +6, *ring of protection* +2, 10 *potions of greater magic fang*, *wand of cure serious wounds* (34 charges).

River of Raging Orcs

There's nothing unusual about orc barbarians, but players expect to meet only one powerful orc barbarian or a small group of wimpy ones simply because orcs are never really a threat past 3rd level.

This metaphorical river of rage is not especially wimpy though, and they travel in large groups. They look like a normal mob of orcs, but their exceptional number of hit points when raging will keep them in the fight long past the point where players expect them to fall down. Further, when they swarm to flank and

every one of them simultaneously power attacks, at least a few will get through and deal terrifying amounts of damage.

Orc Barbarian: Male orc barbarian 4; CR 4; Medium humanoid (orc); HD 4d12+8; hp 34; Init +1; Spd 40 ft.; AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +4; Grp +8; Atk +9 melee (1d12+7/x3, +1 *greataxe*) or +5 ranged (1d8/x3, longbow); Full Atk +9 melee (1d12+7/x3, +1 *greataxe*) or +5 ranged (1d8/x3, longbow); SQ darkvision 60 ft., fast movement, illiteracy, light sensitivity, rage 2/day, trap sense +1, uncanny dodge; AL CE; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will -1; Str 18, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 7, Cha 6.

Skills and Feats: Climb +9, Jump +13, Listen +5, Spot +0, Survival +4; Alertness, Power Attack.

Illiteracy: The orc barbarian does not know how to read and write.

Light Sensitivity (Ex): The orc barbarian is dazzled in bright light or within the radius of a *daylight* spell.

Rage: The following changes are in effect as long as the orc rages: 4d12+16; hp 42; Spd 40 ft.; AC 13, touch 9, flat-footed 13; Grp +10; Atk +11 melee (1d12+10/x3, +1 *greataxe*) or +5 ranged (1d8/x3, longbow); Full Atk +11 melee (1d12+10/x3, +1 *greataxe*) or +5 ranged (1d8/x3, longbow); SV Fort +8, Will +1; Str 22, Con 18; Climb +11, Jump +15. His fit of rage lasts for 7 rounds, though he may voluntarily end it prematurely. After raging, he is fatigued (-2 Strength, -2 Dexterity, can't charge or run) for the duration of that encounter. The orc can fly into a rage only once per encounter and only once per day. Entering a rage takes no time by itself, but the orc can do it only during his action, not in response to someone else's action.

Trap Sense (Ex): The orc has a +1 bonus on Reflex saves made to avoid traps and a +1 dodge bonus to AC against attacks by traps.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): The orc barbarian can react to danger before his senses would normally allow him to even be aware of it. He retains his Dexterity bonus to AC regardless of being caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker. He still loses any Dexterity bonus to AC if immobilized.

Possessions: +1 *studded leather armor*, +1 *greataxe*, longbow, quiver with 20 arrows, *cure light wounds potion*, 20 silver pieces.

Bringing the Parts Together

While it's recommended that you don't spring a series of these nasty little surprises on your unsuspecting PCs one right after the other, you may want to include them in the tools available to one of the group's foes. As such, space out each of these installments or utilize them in a master plan to keep your players and their PCs on their toes.

Coming in Part 2 of Nasty Surprises

Has death become a mere inconvenience to your PCs (and their players)? If so, pop the *soul crusher* into your campaign at an appropriate moment and see what happens!

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